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SUBJECT: Are Guangdong's Electrical and Electronics Engineers Up to Snuff Internationally?

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: According to Moshe Kam of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), less than 10,000 of the Institute's 370,000 members world-wide are from China. With more and more electrical and electronic engineering projects being pursued through global partnerships and arrangements in a Thomas Friedmannesque "The World Is Flat" environment, it is essential for Chinese engineers to obtain internationally recognized certification of high professional standards so that Chinese companies can engage in more of these collaborative projects, Kam said. Guangzhou authorities acknowledged the gap between China and the highly developed world in this respect and pledged to do their best to qualify and involve a greater number of local engineers and students in IEEE membership activities. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Dr. Moshe Kam, Board Member, Vice President of the IEEE for Educational Activities, and Chairman of the Institute's Educational Activities Board is currently passing through Guangzhou, the first stop in a China trip that will take him also to Shanghai and Beijing. In a Easter Day meeting with Guangzhou Communist Party Secretary Lin Shushen, Kam noted the high reputation of the IEEE internationally, with most of its members still coming from the United States and Europe. The mission of IEEE is not only to build and maintain high technical standards and the expertise of its members but also to reinforce strong ethical norms and to promote environmental protection in electrical and electronics engineering projects.

"The World Is Flat," But Not Many Chinese Engineers There

¶3. (SBU) Of the IEEE's 370,000 members, less than 10,000 come from China, and of the 70,000 world-wide student members, less than a handful are Chinese, Kam said. It is especially important that more Chinese join the IEEE and obtain the professional certification that such membership

entails, Kam emphasized. More and more major electrical and electronic engineering projects, including those that determine international technical standards, are being pursued collaboratively and transnationally. In such an environment, described very ably in Thomas Friedman's "The World Is Flat," collaborators and partners in one setting need to have confidence in the technical expertise and professional and ethical standards of engineers in another. IEEE wants to see an increasing number of Chinese electrical and electronics engineering companies engaged in such collaborations, and it was precisely with this likelihood in mind that the IEEE dispatched Kam on this mission.

¶4. (SBU) Kam said that while IEEE has previously conducted seminars and meetings in China, these have almost invariably characterized by foreign experts lecturing or leading the discussions. Kam said that he wants to work towards a situation in which IEEE-sponsored activities in China feature predominantly Chinese engineering professionals. Kam also said that envisions a time when IEEE's District 10 (which covers Southeast and East Asia) will feature a Chinese chairman, who by dint of the position is also a board member of the IEEE.

"We Want In"

¶5. (SBU) After extolling the virtues of Guangzhou including as a major venue for future IEEE activities, Lin acknowledged that there was a major gap between the standards of Chinese engineers and those in the developed world. That did not mean that Chinese engineers were any less knowledgeable technically than their developed world counterparts, but the absence of continuing re-education and international exchange opportunities limited the further development of expertise and skills among working electrical and electronics engineers. He pledged the

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Guangzhou's commitment to changing this state of affairs, and appointed South China University of Technology (SCUT) Acting President Chen Jiequn and Deputy Party Secretary in charge of science and education Fang Xuan to take the lead in showing Kam the present state of the city's and the province's electrical and electronic engineering education system and to seek ways for IEEE to raise technical expertise and professional standards. Lin noted that his son, currently studying for his Ph.D. in electronic engineering at Drexel University with, not coincidentally, Professor Kam as his chief faculty advisor, had emphasized how important it was for Chinese engineers and students to make this jump into internationally recognized professional settings.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) With a huge current and future installed electric power base and with major concentrations of electronics and electrical appliance manufacturers in Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Foshan, and elsewhere, Guangdong Province undoubtedly has a large number of electrical and electronics engineers. Similarly, the educational presence of SCUT and Zhongshan University not to mention branch campuses of Beijing University, Tsinghua, and other major national science and engineering schools suggests that there are an ample number of potential IEEE faculty and student recruits. That being said, however, Huizhou, east of Guangzhou and home to a large number of domestic and international consumer electronics firms, can serve as a metaphor on the state of electronic engineer expertise in south China. Huizhou-based manufacturers reportedly install more electronic motherboards into products than anywhere else in China. But only a minuscule percentage of these motherboards were designed in China, and few if any of the semiconductor subcomponents developed and manufactured there. If South China is to make the leap into the leading international

ranks in electrical and electronic engineering, places like Huizhou will need to have a lot more people who are genuine experts meeting high professional standards.

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